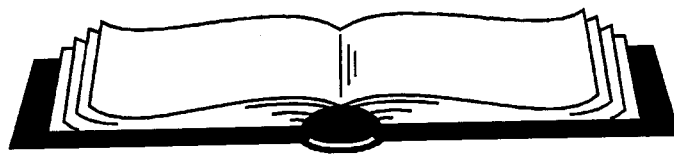


2000-2001

Guidelines and
Application

BEST PRACTICES

**Deadline for Application to County Office:
NOVEMBER 27, 2000**

The Best Practices application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page and page 2, if applicable.

Category Safe Learning Environment (Application is limited to one category. See page 3 for details.)
Practice Name "Different is Better" Sixth Grade Orientation
Number of Schools with Practice 1 (If more than one school or district, read and complete information on page 2.)

County	Burlington
District (Proper Name)	Lumberton School District
Address	30 Dimsdale Drive PO Box 8 Lumberton, NJ 08048
Telephone	(609) 265-7709 Fax (609) 267-0002 Email: logf@lumberton.k12.nj.us
Chief School Administrator	Frank Logandro
Nominated School #1	Lumberton Middle School
Address	30 Dimsdale Drive Lumberton, NJ 08048
Telephone	(609) 265-0123 Fax (609) 265-0476 Email: hutp@lumberton.k12.nj.us
Principal	Patricia Hutchinson
Program Developer(s)	Lumberton Middle School Sixth Grade Teachers
Application Prepared By	Andrea Cole, Christie Haverkamp, and Jennifer Robinson
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	<i>Frank J. Logandro</i>

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ☒ Yes ☐ No County Superintendent's Signature *Walter J. K...*

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**NEW JERSEY
BEST PRACTICES
2000-2001 APPLICATION**

Application Requirements: Failure to comply with the procedures for submission of the application will result in the elimination of the application.

- RESPONSES to the information and the statements below must be ANONYMOUS and ACCURATE.** No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school(s) or community. Use the words "the school" or "the schools" in referring to the applicant in responding to the statements
- USE ONLY THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE APPLICATION FORM on pages 1, 2 (if applicable), and 4.** Do not include any additional materials, as they will not be reviewed in the selection process.
- Application must be **keybaorded on 8 1/2" x 11" white paper, portrait format. Twelve-point or larger computer font or fourteen-pitch or larger typewritten font must be used.** (This sentence is in twelve-point Times New Roman.)
- KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to all the statements below must be **no more than a total of four pages.** Keyboard and number the statement followed by the response. Format your response for accuracy and clarity.
- The information on page 4 and the responses to statements must be copied on **one side of the page.** The information on pages 1 and 2 (if applicable) must be copied on **one side of the page.** Staple pages 1, 2 (if applicable), 4, and the keyboarded responses together, in that same order.
- The original application must be signed by the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person, indicating his/her approval.
- The original and seven copies of the application must be submitted to the county superintendent of schools by **November 27, 2000**, with the **Itemized List of District Applications** form. Keep the seven copies of each application together with the original containing the signature of the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person on the top of each set.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:		
Type of School	Grade Levels	Practice Name "Different Is Better" Sixth Grade Orientation
<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle School	<u>Sixth</u>	Number of Schools with Practice <u>1</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School		Number of Districts with Practice <u>1</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> High School		Location <input type="checkbox"/> Urban/City <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban With Urban Characteristics
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Small City/Town <input type="checkbox"/> Rural

Check the ONE CATEGORY into which the practice best fits.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts (Visual and Performing Arts)	<input type="checkbox"/> Educational Technology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Safe Learning Environment
<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment/Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Gifted and Talented Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> School-to-Careers/Workplace Readiness
<input type="checkbox"/> Bilingual Education and Diversity	<input type="checkbox"/> Health and Physical Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Science
<input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship/Character Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational Support/Guidance and Counseling Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development	<input type="checkbox"/> World Languages
	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Engagement (family involvement and partnerships with business, community, school districts, and/or higher education)	

- Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.
- List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards*, including the *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*,* addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.
- Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.
- Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

*The 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.

1. **Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.**

The school's sixth grade teachers plan and implement a special first day orientation for incoming students. This innovative orientation program acclimates all sixth graders to the middle school setting. This practice promotes high student achievement by clearly setting parameters, explaining expectations, and reducing the stress and anxiety of what can be an overwhelming transition.

The objectives of this program are to foster a school comfort zone which will help students feel safe, understand expectations, develop responsibility, integrate tolerance, focus on curriculum, and instill a joy for school. The specific objectives are:

- ◆ To recognize individual differences and highlight the benefits of diversity,
- ◆ To promote self esteem, confidence, respect, and tolerance,
- ◆ To identify different strategies for conflict resolution and use them to respond effectively and peacefully and,
- ◆ To orient incoming middle school students to new teachers, procedures, building, and resources.

Just as a variety of cookies makes a better batch, the collaboration of individual personalities, ideas, and experiences make a better class. The orientation schedule is separated into three components: introducing middle school staff and promoting peer relations in a non-threatening environment, presenting school programs, expectations, and procedures, and understanding conflict resolution.

The first component includes teacher introductions and a large group activity that promotes a "Different is Better" theme. A short teacher presentation utilizing vanilla wafers initiates an open dialogue about individuality. Students realize that even though we are all very different, we can work together and get along. Students also realize the benefits of being different. Breaking into small cooperative groups to list similarities and differences within the group supports this idea. A people scavenger hunt brings closure to this component.

School programs, expectations, and procedures are also addressed. Each student orientation packet includes important information about necessary supplies, middle school schedules, lunch procedures, elective courses, the sixth grade discipline policy, and behavior management program. This packet is referred to at various times during the day.

The final component, conflict resolution, is continued throughout the school year. Open discussion about recognizing what triggers conflict can help students combat problems effectively. This leads to an introduction of different conflict styles. Teachers then perform a skit, modeling different responses to a conflict situation. Students recognize their own style of conflict management as well as what triggers anger. Students are taught how to respond rather than react to a problem. Activities promoting conflict resolution are continually reinforced throughout the school building. Sixth graders follow up with classroom guidance lessons, special presentations from seventh

grade Peer Mediators and eighth grade Natural Helpers, with a recurring emphasis on “Different is Better”.

This program reduced student anxiety about middle school expectations and provided a smooth transition into a new school. This permitted the sixth grade students to focus on setting and achieving goals. The orientation paved the way for student success, reduced incidences of conflict, and lowered parent concerns.

2. **List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards*, including the *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standards. Provide an example to substantiate your response.**

The “Different Is Better” program incorporates various Core Curriculum Content and Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards. The comprehensive orientation addresses the following areas: Language Arts Literacy, Social Studies, and Cross Content Workplace Readiness.

Oral and written expressions are critical to the learning process. Our students participated in many activities addressing the Language Arts Literacy standards. The most notable include *listening attentively and critically to a variety of speakers* (Standard 3.2), *writing from experiences, thoughts, and feelings* (Standard 3.3), and *modifying oral communication in response to the reactions of others* (Standard 3.1). Students attended to a variety of teachers as they introduced middle school faculty, programs, and procedures. Since each teacher has a unique teaching style, the students were given the opportunity to listen critically to different presentations. Listing similarities and differences as well as journal writing encouraged students to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings about diversity, individuality, and learning. Students recognized their own trigger words, listened to what words angered peers in their group, and identified how their words impact a conflict situation.

When students are made aware of other cultures, they in turn are more likely to understand themselves. Activities promoting the Social Studies core standards prepare students to make informed decisions as part of an interdependent world. Sixth grade orientation provides the opportunity for students *to understand the multiple influences of gender, family background, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, and nationality as the basis for analysis of individual identity* (Standard 6.5). Orientation challenges students *to understand how works of aesthetic expression serve as cultural representation* (Standard 6.2). This was demonstrated when students created models of themselves. Each day, students observe the images that hang in their hallway, helping them to understand the cultural identities of their peers. Whole class and small group discussion provided an open arena for student sharing of ideas, family traditions, and personal preferences. Students found ten things they had in common with a group of peers and then found ten things that were unique to their own lives. Students participated in a People Scavenger Hunt that afforded them the opportunity to learn some interesting facts about their classmates’ identities.

Cross Content Workplace Readiness standards enable students to use critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills. Our program, which focuses on creating a safe learning environment that actively engages students incorporates many of

these standards. This *includes recognizing/defining problems and clarifying decisions* (Standard 3.1), *identifying/evaluating the validity of alternative solutions* (Standard 3.11), *working cooperatively with others to accomplish a task* (Standard 4.2), and *evaluating their own actions and accomplishments* (Standard 4.3). Throughout the day, educators presented students with the tools they could use to construct their own knowledge. For example, cooperative learning took place during small group instruction about diversity. Students participated in team building games in the school gym. These activities, facilitated by the physical education teachers, motivated students to solve their own problems by working together and making choices for the well being of the team. Students learned to avoid conflict in an appropriate manner. They communicated using “I Messages” to solve disagreements and maintain respect for each other’s feelings. They then read a poem about the consequences of losing their tempers and the importance of thinking before speaking. Finally, students completed a personal relationship web. This documented the important people in the students’ lives, described what kind of relationship they maintained with them, and demonstrated the importance of responding rather than reacting to conflict.

3. **Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.**

The transition from elementary school to middle school can be difficult and stressful for students. The needs of the incoming students are as diverse as the individuals themselves. This valuable workshop utilizes cooperative learning, communication skills, creativity, sensitivity, and conflict resolution to focus on people as diverse individuals.

Students need to recognize that it is our differences that can unite, rather than divide us. Appreciating diversity helps students make choices about who they are, what they want to achieve, and ultimately who they become. It is necessary for students who come from different cultures, social classes, and ability levels to have a safe learning environment. Our school strives to provide a comfortable setting in which all children can come together and learn.

A variety of assessment measures were applied to evaluate the objectives. Students demonstrated an understanding of concepts through written and oral activities. Whole group discussions and activities were revisited in small group settings, thus giving students the opportunity to apply what they learned.

Throughout the day, each component of the workshop was assessed. Students documented similarities and differences, trigger words, and conflict styles.

As a culminating activity, students created a “Different is Better” hall display. Students displayed individual gingerbread replicas of themselves. They included physical characteristics, personal style, interests, and hobbies. Sixth grade unity, diversity, and creativity can be seen each day as we walk through our halls.

We continue to assess the acquisition of skills and concepts of this important program as the school year progresses. Students apply strategies they learned about conflict resolution when dealing with peers and teachers. This year’s class has

accumulated 57 V-Free days. This school wide program calls for no victims, no violence, and no vandalism. Since the program's inception, the number of demerits issued to sixth graders has declined. During the 1998-1999 school year, the year prior to the launch of the "Different is Better" program, approximately 20% of school demerits were issued to sixth graders. After the orientation program was introduced during the 1999-2000 school year, the percentage of sixth graders earning demerits dropped to about 14%. In the third year, the percentage of demerits issued to sixth grade students declined even further to about 5%. The middle school has noted a decrease in the number of sixth grade detentions as well. This record only verifies that our students have internalized and practiced many of the concepts taught at orientation. They have further applied this knowledge to create a safer learning environment.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

The "Different is Better" program can easily be adapted to any school setting or district. Diversity and conflict resolution strategies are areas that all schools need to address. As we become a more complex society, the problems and issues of students become more complex. Starting the school year with an orientation equips students to better handle conflict in a responsible and thoughtful manner. It further creates an atmosphere of acceptance while it relieves student anxiety and stress, thus providing a smoother transition to middle school life while identifying available support systems.

The program can be replicated by following a few easy steps. First, assess the needs of the student population. This can lead into brainstorming the most important issues that will impact student success. Next, determine availability of school facilities to accommodate orientation activities. Once this is complete, modify the orientation packet (available upon request) to meet the needs of all students and to define your specific school programs and procedures. Delegate responsibilities to appropriate staff members. This includes assigning facilitators for discussions, arranging orientation schedule, preparing orientation packet, purchasing needed supplies, and planning student assessment materials. Meet to finalize the schedule and sequence of events. Ensure all expectations and activities are understood by all staff members involved. After all this collaborative work, you will be ready to implement this important and successful program.